

Yugoslavia: The 13th Party Congress

The Communist Party Congress in late June was one of the liveliest in recent Yugoslav history but offered few new solutions to the country's pressing economic, ethnic, and political problems. The congress took a small step toward checking the flow of power to the eight dominant regional elites by giving some new authority to the party center and introducing a few democratic trappings. It also elected a crop of new, younger leaders, who may be more pragmatic—but also more parochial—than their Tito-era elders. The congress reaffirmed Belgrade's nonaligned foreign policy and directed a few barbs at the United States. Moscow's participation was correct but showed that Gorbachev has other priorities.

Domestic Issues

Like the last congress in 1982, the agenda of the 13th Yugoslav Party Congress, held in Belgrade on 25-28 June, was overshadowed by the country's serious economic problems. In the main congress speech, outgoing party chief Vidoje Zarkovic candidly admitted the leadership's lackluster performance in coping with heavy foreign debts, rampant inflation, falling living standards, widespread joblessness, and a growing gap between a richer north and poorer south. But he offered few solutions beyond removing regional obstructions to carrying out set policy. Premier Branko Mikulic, speaking at a commission session, had even harsher words about flaunting decisions and urged support for new government proposals now before parliament. The proposals garnered support from some delegates, but the congress took no official stand.

The congress was spared disruptions—but just barely—by several increasingly vocal public pressure groups. Shortly before the conclave opened, security forces in Kosovo Province dispersed hundreds of ethnic Serbs who were preparing to march on Belgrade to protest discrimination by ethnic Albanians. Western press reports said the authorities

curtailed public transit between Kosovo and Belgrade during the congress, a move that probably did little to burnish the regime's image of openness.

Nonetheless, Kosovo and other contentious issues surfaced from the congress floor with a vengeance unknown in most Communist countries. Several delegates gave impetus to the country's burgeoning antinuclear movement, speaking against plans—so far still on hold—to proceed with several new plants. And some military officials warned of growing pacifism among youth in the northern Republic of Slovenia.

Institutional Changes

Perhaps more significant than the rhetoric were some statutory and procedural changes made at the congress and at some of the eight regional congresses leading up to it. The congress adopted a revised party statute intended to give the party center a few more tools to deal with recalcitrant regional bosses. It reportedly strengthened the Leninist principle of democratic centralism, the linchpin of intraparty discipline. It also reportedly gave the Central Committee the right to monitor more closely the regional Central Committees and call special regional party congresses when major national decisions are defied.

Election procedures also were altered at the expense of regional brokers. In the regional congresses, competitive multiple candidates elections—optional under both the old and new statutes—were applied more widely than at any time since the liberalization era of the late 1960s, in some cases complicating the plans of party bosses. And at the national congress, a statutory change gave the delegates the right, for the first time in two decades, to reject the regions' choices for key national posts. While the delegates ended up

~~Secret~~

Recent Party Congresses

Congress	Date	Major Outcome	Soviet Representative
9	March 1969	Endorsed and carried forward the process of decentralization that began three years earlier; gave regional parties the right to draw up own statutes and appoint choices to top national parties bodies.	*
10	May 1974	Confirmed a partial return to stronger central party authority, a greater party role in the political system following the crushing of the Croatian liberal-nationalist movement in 1971.	Politburo and Secretariat member Kirilenko.
11	June 1978	Tito's last congress capped several years of political stability, economic progress, and increased international standing; streamlined Presidium but made few policy changes.	Politburo and Secretariat member Kulakov.
12	June 1982	First congress since Tito's death, reflected growing leadership concern, lack of direction as the country was thrown into economic crisis.	Politburo candidate member Kuznetsov.
13	June 1986	Took limited organizational steps to strengthen party central authority, ushered in younger leadership, tolerated more open airing of competing interests.	Politburo member Aliyev.

* Boycott by CPSU and most Soviet Bloc parties following Belgrade's denunciation of the invasion of Czechoslovakia the previous summer.

approving all the regions' choices, tallies varied widely, with many well-known figures faring shoddily.

New Leadership

One of the more pronounced effects of the elections was generational turnover. The mean age of the 165-member Central Committee and 23-member Presidium dropped by nearly 10 years to about 46 and 51, respectively, thus eclipsing the class of leaders from Tito's partisan generation. In their place is a diverse new group that appears to be better educated,

more pragmatic and sophisticated—but also more tied to parochial regional interests—than their predecessors.

Age factors aside, the backgrounds and reputations of many of the newly elected leaders suggest that factional infighting probably will increase on several key issues:

- *Interregional economic relations.* Disputes are likely to sharpen over allocating scarce resources among the diverse regions. Several of the more Pan-Yugoslav leaders have retired, and many of the new members—such as the new titular party head

¹ For details on these and other changes, see *European Review* 1986, "Yugoslavia: Party Plans Organizational Reforms."

Pages: 23

Exemptions: (b)(1) (b)(2)

~~Secret~~

Milanko Renovica, of Bosnia, Macedonia's Jakov Lazaroski, Serbia's Dusan Ckrebic and Slobodan Mitosevic, Slovenia's Franc Setinc, and Vojvodina's Bosko Kronic—have built their careers on defending local interests.

- *Freedom of expression.* The members will probably be sharply divided over the limits on freedom of expression and the press. The new Presidium includes outspoken opponents of liberal dissent such as Croatia's Stipe Suvar and Ivica Racan, Bosnia's Ivan Brigic, and Vojvodina's Bosko Kronic. Facing them will be such probable moderates as the six Serbian and Slovene delegates and a shaggy young, US-educated Macedonian, Vasil Tupurkovski.
- *Market forces.* Differences will probably also surface over the introduction of more market forces in the country's unorthodox Communist economy. The ideologues and traditionalists will probably favor heavy use of administrative measures—such as wage and price controls—while several pragmatists are likely to see market forces as essential to recovery.
- *The Serbia problem.* Strains between Serbia and its autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina over distributing authority in the republic may also increase because several more moderate representatives from these regions have been replaced by staunch advocates of local interests.

Foreign Relations

The congress reaffirmed Belgrade's traditional nonaligned foreign policy in advance of a Nonaligned Summit this August and its interest in balancing its position between the United States and the USSR. From the US standpoint, the congress's foreign policy resolution took a disappointingly equivocal stand on terrorism—criticizing pressures on alleged sponsors of terrorism as well as attempts to equate liberation movements with terrorism. Judging from previous, more positive comments by a Yugoslav official to US diplomats, the resolution probably was altered after the US bombing of Libya. Party chief Zarkovic also took a swipe at the US Administration for statements on the SALT II accord, reflecting Belgrade's

increasingly skeptical comment on US arms control policy. And several speakers aired tensions with neighboring Albania, Bulgaria, and Greece over longstanding ethnic disputes.

Moscow sent a full Politburo member, Geydar Aliyev, to the congress. This is a formal upgrading in representation from the last congress but is still below the level of Soviet representation at the recent gatherings in East Germany, Bulgaria, and Poland and does not involve a heavy hitter on the Politburo. Most of Moscow's East European allies sent the equivalent of Politburo/Secretariat members. The Soviet party greetings to the congress took fewer pains than in 1982 to endorse Yugoslav principles governing relations among sovereign states.

Outlook

The statutory amendments—probably the result of an understanding between southern centralists and northern conservatives—lay at least the legal groundwork for a modest revival of central authority. The leadership may find this right particularly useful if it feels the need to intervene in such regions as Kosovo and Serbia to stem growing nationalism. But implementation, as always, will depend on the will and issue-oriented alignments of the regional elites, and the incoming national leadership looks at least as divided as the previous one. The experiments with competitive elections will probably continue, albeit haphazardly, and may mark a partial step toward renewal of some of the more stultified regional parties.

The relatively harmonious atmosphere at the congress suggests that the party is becoming increasingly tolerant of divergent views. This contrasts with the highly charged atmosphere of less than two years ago, when some debates over reforming the system grew so sharp as to seem to call into question the very ability of the country to hold together. In this sense, the party is becoming more and more a mirror of the real, competing interest groups in one of the Communist world's most fragmented societies. The regional parties also showed restraint but aired their respective positions at each of their congresses.

~~Secret~~

~~Secret~~

Despite this hint of increased maturity, the party still left open the key question of how to exercise a constructive role in the unorthodox, complex political system where—unlike in more traditional authoritarian Communist systems—nonparty bodies play an important role and the pace of change and implementation is slow at best. Chances are that the same question will continue to dog party leaders in the period ahead and as they prepare for their next congress four years from now.

[REDACTED]